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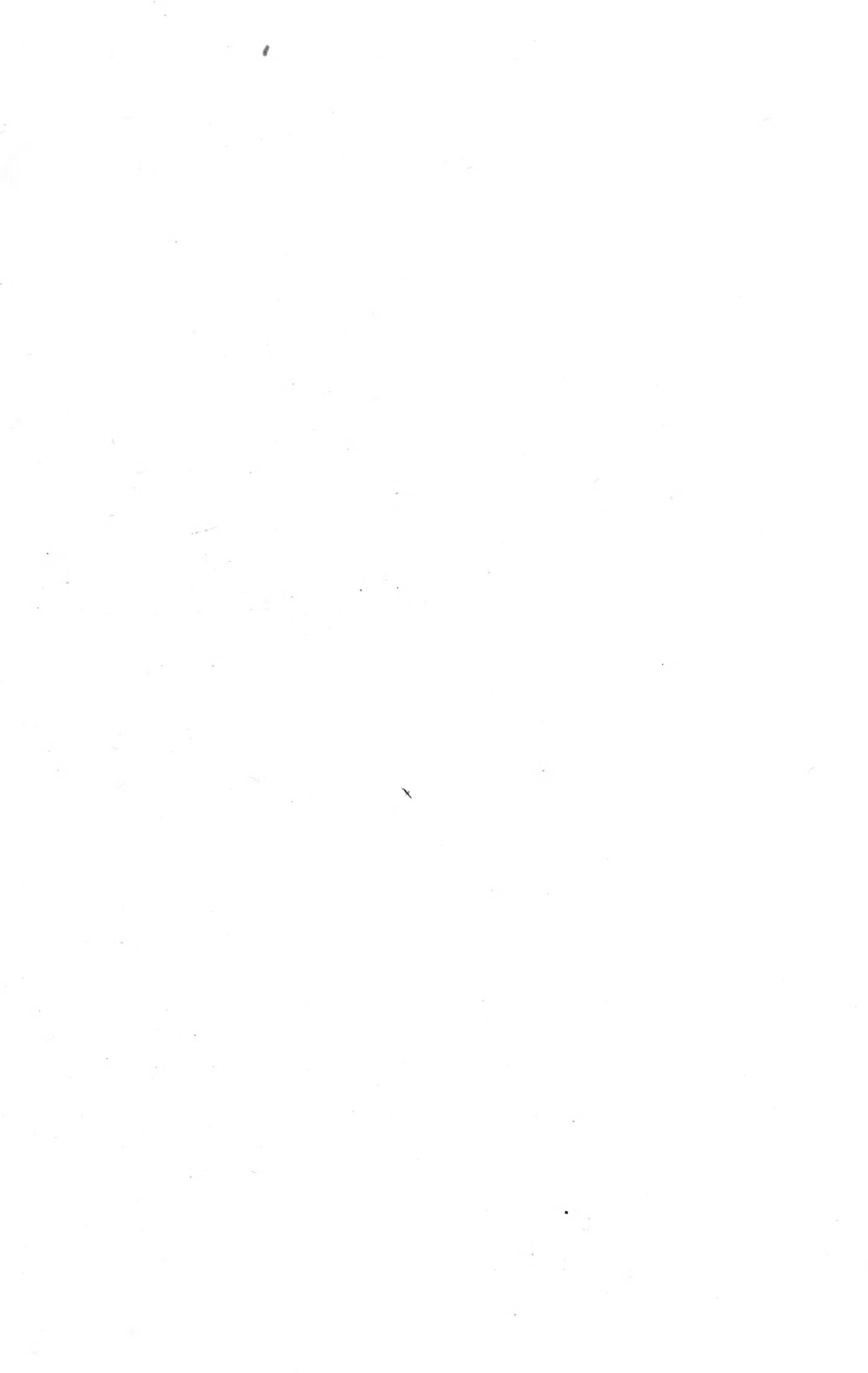
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HIRSCHMAN # CORRESPONDENCE OF
AMERICANS




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A CORRESPONDENCE OF AMERICANS

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Jack Hirschman

— a
correspondence
of Americans

INDIANA UNIVERSITY PRESS
1960 • BLOOMINGTON

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Acknowledgment is made to the following periodicals for permission to reprint the poems indicated:

To *Coraddi* for "David and Saul"; to *Folio* for "Calligraph"; to *Prairie Schooner* for "Hart Crane"; to *Botteghe Oscure* for "A Correspondence of Americans"; to *Chelsea Review* for "From the Ptolemaic Statues of the Serapeum of Memphis" and "Strophe" from *The Bestiary*; to *Hip Pocket Poems* for "Ikou."



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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 60-8915

Manufactured in the United State of America

for Ruth

*old men carrying their fathers and philosophers
weeping in the dust, America perhaps, Don Quixote*
—MALCOLM LOWRY, *Under the Volcano*

INTRODUCTION / *Karl Shapiro*

I AM PROUD to introduce *A Correspondence of Americans*, though I am reluctant to stand between the poems and the reader. The present-day custom of writing introductions and blurbs to books of poems is a bad one. It makes authorities of preface-writers and sets up a chain of literary command. It encourages critics to increase and multiply, and keeps the poet a hostage to criticism. My pleasure in writing a foreword for this richly talented poet is offset by the knowledge that he may be judged by my remarks and not by his poems. Let us hope not. Let my comments, whether good criticism or not, serve only to open the door for him. It is a solemn thing to publish a first volume of poems, and a serious matter to introduce them.

Of the hundreds and hundreds of competently written books of poems published every year, there is rarely one that distinguishes itself from the common idiom. It is always an event of importance to find a poet whose speech is his own. The poet who has evolved his own particular version of the language is ultimately the only interesting poet, the one whose name we remember. I am not talking about "style," which is usually no more than a polite variation of the norm, but of invention itself. For poetry is not simply a way of saying something: it is a way of seeing. The poet is the one who confers significance upon his language, by seeing through it and by using it new. The true poet is no respecter of language; quite the contrary.

Jack Hirschman is such an inventor, not a stylist or an eccentric or a faddist. He takes the "forms" as they come, whether the meters or the meanings. He takes them or leaves them. He uses American as it strikes him—as it probably is—with a rich baroque guttural, learned or New Yorkese, bombastic or tender, with the full gamut of the comedy of our unbelievable, impossible heritage. He has

managed to avoid the three deepest pitfalls of modern poetry: the phony mythopoeia, the "wit" of the academy, and the self-pitying social protest. He is neither ashamed of what he knows nor carried away by it; he is natural.

What a relief to find a poet who is not afraid of the "vulgar" or the "sentimental," who can burst out laughing or cry his head off in poetry, who can make love to language or kick it in the pants. Hirschman is a kind of Hart Crane, without Crane's fatal humorlessness or his more fatal culture-mongering. His own poems for Hart Crane, for W. C. Fields, and for Allen Ginsberg are human documents of poetry, not exercises of disembodied sensibility.

In the twentieth century poets have been theorized to death, don'ted to death by the archbishops and crackpots of the Word. A few poets have managed to write poetry in spite of the sickly literary atmosphere. Some, like Dylan Thomas, have died in the attempt to charge through the intellectual *cordon sanitaire* to the poetry-starved audience. To Hirschman these battles are ancient history. The babel of tongues is one language to him; the cities of the plain are as home. To be at home in the world, however it happens to be—what more can we ask of the poet?

This then is goodbye to the nonsense of exile and all the pseudo-epigraphy of modernism. This is poetry under the natural conditions of its time. It is only a beginning perhaps but it is a way back to the center of the only known world. It is a world that corresponds, and the correspondences are all in American.

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CALLIGRAPH

Her hair hysterical, thrown back at the sight
Of the rose my throbbing boyhood brought,
Incensed, how the man in me leaped from my blush
And struck a trembling smile upon her mouth,

And how, drawing a tattered kimono close,
With fingers soft as pounded paraffin,
She bent and lifted up a thin-necked vase
To put the flower in.

HART CRANE: APRIL 27, 1932

In retrospect at dawn, through the bottle of gin
That was his window on the world, he saw the sun
Not quite. The sun, not; something on the horizon,
And then no thing but one, a someone, Chaplin
Dancing there. And going nowhere dancing there
And yet his shoes, too large, the old burlesque
He knew would drop its jaws and show the cigarets
Butted and heaped to keep his arches warm, were
Opening instead and radiating beams of red and white
Across the sea between. Alternately, the foamed
And bloodied thighs seemed waves rocking the boat home
To a star-forgotten island under the knotted smiles,
But too drunk for the fathoming of such flanks
He drank.

The bottle's upsidedown. But you are all support
For arms that wilt unless embracing, mon capitaine.
So we are on the deck together, three again
Gazing at the distant swoons of the Florida port
Of palms. They'll welcome you with knives sharper
Than whaletooth behind their grace, you spewed
Son of a hook and a scar. And you who knew
First the electric touch of flesh strikes darker
Than any plumb can gauge, they'll dismember
With finely pointed pens. Except you. Listen,
Before the sun that blinds at nine, at dawn Chaplin
Was dancing on the dragon's tongue, I swear,
O shoulders,
Gone! So, limp, I cork and hurl and watch it float,
My bibelot.

At twelve o'clock the sun came down to dote, a pom-pon
On the sea that floated bluely like a sailor's cap,
And the pure sky, unreconciled, stood without rank as
At twelve o'clock the sun came down to dote, a pom-pon.
The scuttled giant of a hulk settled at the bottom,
In his blacked eyes were fishegged irises, a highway of
Fins trafficked the broken bridge of the nose of
The scuttled giant of a hulk settled at the bottom.
And such a span was the nimbus of the bellbottoms
The fanged generations, minnow and shark,
Lay down together in the sanctuaried arc,
And such a span was the nimbus of the bellbottoms,
That at the bandy-joined wishbone of death and love
He dove.

W . C . F I E L D S

By Jove, my glowworm dove my chickadee Death's
Caught up with me at last with the last billing,
And so many elegant days are still unsipped.
'Tis a fraud, I say, 'tis a fraud; 'tis fraught
With imminent danger, the coming of this fellow
In the bright nightgown.

Drat it, goodbye stuffed fowl of a life foreshortened,
Goodbye rim of the glass of pure water forlorn,
Goodbye blond pulchritude of farflung travels,
Sunflowers I shall not sniff, balls not juggle,
Goodbye. In a moment rather I shall endeavor
To climb the wagon whose steeds will wend
Bumpily along the road's parched tongue
To the provinces.

But, Jehosaphat, my good man, has the chef
By some mischance omitted the paprika?

IKON

of Allen Ginsberg

His howl grabbed me by my high intangibles;
His humor, of the ghetto-American, riddled
Me silly as Fosdick of the cops
My gassy dialectic escaping to be filled
By dancing inbetween despairs, and flops.

A cloud in trousers bagged by the wind
I came down the musical chute to find
In a riff-raff flat, a pock on the cheek
Off the stumblebum-bandaged nose of the Bowery,
A kind of a poet and a humankind of skin:

The frockcoat face with its curling sleeves
Of raskolnikovian-rivington weave,
Then the horned spectacle of his eyes, a cross
Between the visionary and mission bum-boss,
So shoulder-drooped they kissed across his body;

And a kitchen as shamled as the czarina's
My grandmother's slum, whose bulbos
Bloomed in the potted beds, and every bed
Grew a plot of hysterical revolution as
The sons of the gungel slept.

We sat, we talked over crumbs while a roach
Shuttled like a brown monk to and fro
Across the thread unwinding tongues spelt out,
Tottering this way, with whispers of my host
And, with my host of praises, that:

Shrug which kept our balance and composed
An hour's ease between my eyes and those
Of the invert in the apocalyptic rant

Who swaddled a century burning in his thighs
And tousled the strings of its dying instruments.

From his hands I saw that he
Was in a perpetual state of litany;
Between the thin blue lines of lips
I could almost read with fingertips
The wine-drenched letters of a race
Driven across the tragic page
Incomprehensibly with laughter.

Here was no perfection of tongues
But a babel apprenticing;
Confounded and blasted young, what
If whatever came up spat out of throat?
Dimestore prophecies at best, and yet,
With the everlasting eyes of Charlot
And, of Gargantua, the laughter,

I felt our words promising to become
Huddled buddies under the bomb,
Learning like Fields and Marc Chagall,
Yeats and Finnegan and all that fell
From the first into the human tense
To scramble to their feet and dance
Circles round the crater,

Billowing across the dazzled sky
Benignly tender zeppelins of a smile,
Signature of all things yet to come
When the light fades and we lay down
Drumbeat and intellection's scars
And wake to name the things around by heart.

SPIRIT OF '76

Halleluiah, I'm a bum on Easter Sunday,
I just woke up to tory fife & drum-tattoo
& tapping my pocket to find the bottle's safe
I found a tin-foiled box of Copenhagen snuff
Inside the hole inside the hole in my jacket.

Halleluiah, I'm a bum on Easter Sunday,
Not a dingbat thing in the universe to do
But listen for the tory fife & drum-tattoo
Approaching, & gaze up at the girder above me
Where Nathan Hale's my gibbeted bedfellow

The savior's barred & boarded the saloons
& the wreckers've torn down the coin-dropping El-tracks
& left the indifferent blue.

Halleluiah, I'm a bum on Easter Sunday,
While closer comes the tory fife & drum-tattoo,
& it doesn't make a bit of difference to me
That Thirty-fourth & Fifth's the tallest bottle
In the world, with a golden bald eagle at the top
Of its corking, sticking its beak out at me
In broad daylight, because it's sticking its beak
Out at you, bum, tattoo.

from THE PTOLEMAIC STATUES OF THE
SERAPEUM OF MEMPHIS

for Leon Golub

Pindar's body is most of all whole,
Throned among these poets and philosophers:
Though his face is pounded flat by time
His scepter Olympian muscles of a lyre
Strumming a song aimed at the parallel dromes
Aimed at the horizon's breast-splitting cord,
Pindar's body is most of all whole,

Otherwise rubble:

Heraclites,
A bony-thonged leg.
IPOTAF stumped
Like the very letters of his name.
The waisted torso of Orpheus
With chipped intimations of wings
Dead about his feet,

While a few scattered and decapitated
Sphinx from the Avenue of the Sphinx
And the holy Serapeum
Have their bodies turned to them,
Enigmatically.

And above all
Players in this play
In this sun-eaten pit and basin
In this amphitheater of sand
Where I am here today
Come down in flesh and bone,
A mid-twentieth century
Son of a melody sounding

And resounding void of theme,
Come down to find the meaning
After many bedouin driftings,
The Father and the Truth
To attach these senses to,

Above all

Players in this play
Plato only holds the key
To the stage behind the stage,
Of whose statuary body
Only hieroglyphs remain,
A dwarfed and hooded mystery
Where the head begins at waist:
Nothing but a fist but the fist
That burning to be
The very fistless essence of,
Absent of all mortality,

I turn

To the sculpturing wind
That the sculpturing wind
Turn me to stone
And then erode until addenda
And appendages be gone,
And being but a rubble in the midst
Closer to what timeless being is,
I shall be a knuckle of that fist
Closed round the key

That a few scattered and decapitated
Sphinx from the Avenue of the Sphinx
And the holy Serapeum
Are turning turning their bodies to,
Enigmatically.

TORNADO

Amid shambles blown, blown pages of a Gideon,
A farmer with a pitchfork stepped
Before the microphone and said it was a huge
Black arm did it, come sweeping across
The tabletop plain, grizzly, on a binge.

His wife, kind of scared and something shy
Of things stuck right before your face
To talk into, was in the distant field
Pecking at the wreckage of a moviehouse
Fallen out of the sky, for pans.

And still agog, the kid in overalls
Was dancing on shingles, leaping
From tree to tree, his blond crop fluttering,
Yelling to all the buried farmboys
About the swindging tail of the dragon that snapped.

NON-OBJECTIVE PAINTING
OF AMERICA

Here nothing is fixed. Like nature
Nothing ever stands still long enough
For a pen to set down upon paper
Or a brush to found upon canvas
A structure directed and tough.

Everything's everywhere moving
North south east west
And always away from the center
Where there's never the natural danger
Of freak accidents.

No wonder then that the middle
Is part of the west, and the north
Runs into the eastern border
And something like a sombrero
Straddling the southern border

Makes the south run into the souther
And so forth. And you ask: Can a hero
Emerge from this impossible muddle?
Where is the splendid antique structure,
The centered figure, the blue beyond?

And it answers: That's me, America,
For you. Where the muddle is the hero,
Continually practicing how to be whacky,
Since everyone knows the blue and the blond
Are as joky

As Joyce and bats as Bugnolo,
Who can find a slice of Virginia tobacco
On the back of an anonymous hearse
Traveling north from East Mishawauka,
And taking it to his studio

Forget it ever was,
While scraping and rescraping a creation
Out of movement out of seething inspiration
Toughbrown and green and hot with combustion,
An immensely infinitesimal universe.

The Bestiary

eternally angry, eternally separated, in
a cataleptic frozen gesture of abandon . . .

DJUNA BARNES, *nightwood*

STROPHE

We have forgotten what enchantment is. Each step
Is a descent indecently descendant of a shame,
Shedding what perversities we cannot name
As one continually sheds a weddingdress
Descending to a newer nakedness
That only new perversity can claim.

Remember, once, going up these stairs
Once before going up and finding doors
That were opening upon
Whole albums of warm and human breath,
And the tomboy titillations down the bannisters,
Sliding down to the barking, carpeted floor
And standing upright and parting your hair
The better to see the firelight upstairs
Arranging itself in a troop of golden falcons
To wing you back up for more.

Now jealous parakeets cawk me out of the rooms
Where I have left a little of my night
In rabid signature upon a body's white
Neck and bosom, and in mascara tins,
And I fix behind me my vestigial bones
That all my sisters see me here,
Each step taken lonelier
Than the step to be taken were,

That all should cry, Beware, Beware
Her flashing eyes, her floating hair
Weave a circle round her thrice,
And gathering in a queenly train
Behind me, of amphibians,
How in the name of Light should I
Tear my body from their cries
When we are altogether damned upright
As we are all together stitched and bound
To go down to the basest step of the night
Gazing at the naked beastface of our wound
A paw away and froze in a muzzle of ice.

FRONTPIECE

Here it all begins, Dear,
On this spinning disk,
With the needlepoint, Dear,
Grooving out a grin
Down the midmoist center
Of the icon with
One cheek manly boned, Dear,
One cheek feminine,
Cheek to cheek alone, Dear:
The fundamental crackdown
And debasement of the rhythm
On this spinning disk
Where it all begins.

BIRDS

I'm here as the penguin.
It's all so new,
This habit of tuxedo,
And the birds one finds
Herself confessing to:
Long-legged Ibis,
Bent with a beeriness
Turning her against herself,
Pecking at her groin;
And Ulula, Cuculus, Garrula,
Grus—all manner of aves
Strayed from the vias
Of Ave Maria: owls that owl,
Vultures that vamp
With night grown deeper
Behind its cowl,
With bawk of bats
And tedium's flit,
All come out with hoot
And howl, with chitter of wing
And tittering strut
And God knows what
Hell is this parliament of fowls.

In the center Madame Pavo,
Robin-jackdaw-peacock-squatter,
With her hundred eyes
Growing wider, growing fatter
On their "Ecce, ecce, bravo, bravo,"
Shows between her two plump cheeks
A dagger-sharp and shiny beak
And bows down
Making the rounds
Of the parliament of fowls.

ABC

Albino-white and alabaster freezing
She struts before her mate who
Follows her blond-tail swing,
A property man who keeps acute
Eyes upon his holdings,
Though she can put a blinder on
To draw the shades of any man
When she goes agelding.

“Blueblooded bitch with high cheekbones
Flank to flank she knots her stride
With mine, of all the mongrels
Hounding after hide,
And I would rear with teeth unbit,
If not for the yawn in my stomach’s pit,
Bite off her tail and bury it
With the bastard child inside.”

Cock among chickens, cuckolded,
He tries to strut, mistrustful,
Through
Coops where tittering “Anycockllo’s”
Leave his bantam chest deflated
Stub his royal claws from clinging
And that beak, degenerated
To a scared crow’s lechering.

MUSICIANS

Trombone, sax and bongo-drum
Bless the bed that we sprawl on
Darkly spectacled.

Blow and thump an antiphon
Filling up our vacant gut
Shot with hope and fear.
With the organistrum dated,
And the bombardon, negotiate
Some other frantic spires:
Improvising Bach, or better,
Cantatas by Saint Buxtehude.
Watch us choir.

Like white altarboys we pipe
Fugues as whistle-clean as fifes,
Ascending and sustained
Way up on high, here architect—
Tiptoploftically; then crack
And break our throat and drain
Down through dams and panting lie
On the white sheet rhythmically,
A spreading stain.

Trombone, sax and bongo-drum
Bless the bed that we sprawl on
Darkly spectacled.

C A T S

In the tiled confessional
Retching, bent and white as sin,
I spill with guts and jiggergin
Dead wrens that I am knotted with
Into the still pool

And the nursery bird is crying
The sky is falling.

Some cat's clawing at the door,
Some cat's crying to get in
While I'm kneeling on all fours
At the putrid chalice rim
For absolution

And the nursery bird is crying
The sky is falling.

Now the claws are round the knob
And around the bowl my own
Cling to the wine of my overflow
As the door miaows like a snarl
In an empty groin

And the nursery bird is crying
The sky is falling.

Try the window, quick. Or razor,
Sharp. Jump! Cut! Jump! Cut!
But between the actor and the act
Lies the failure: You can't
Cut out of your heart

The nursery bird that's crying
The sky is falling.

Let cool music therefore drown us,
Fill the jiggers up around us,
Watch us making it and while
We are slop and sliver, pull
Someone, please, the flush!

CENTERPIECE

Exactly at the midnight moment, exactly in the crack between
The dark hours behind us and the dark hours before us
Half of the hunter's body and half of the hunted's
Seeking me came to me begging they meet in me,
Turning and turning; sic, sic shall they
Be received by me; sic shall they
Be found; sic shall they be
Opened

DOGMA

Be fruitful and multiply your fruits, saith the Dogma,
And I will judge you not. Turn out the light and let me
Feel the texture of the double-croched kiss in the dark,
The stubbled and beard-bumbled smack of seamed lips,
And I will judge you not. Straighten and twang me as I
Hear the twanging sadistic tongue, a Maestro of the Art,
Coming down like a frenzied baton on the white behind
Where a hymn with notations the droppings of blackcandles
Muffed in the night is printed, and spreading, and hot,
And I will judge you not. My voyage among you is as seer
Of Darkness, dense and lapless as the sea that drifts
From cell to cell dilating and contracting like a uterus,
A sponge. I am what I feel and what I feel I forespill:
Be fruitful then and multiply your fruits, saith the Dogma,
For the time is come round to the toll of a second coming
When one man betweenwomen spliced on a bed, clinging together
Gregorian chimes, shall announce the gospelsed resurrection
Of the tooth of the mastiff that chewed through Dante's rhyme.
I felt its bite long since, saith the Dogma. Rising, I feel
You rising in its clench. And I will judge you not.

LUPINE

Stretched across the floor, sole to sole
Touching except for the bottle inbetween,
We prowl each other with words like steppenwolves,
While in the chairs stationed at either side
Our loves and desolations sit stupefied
And powerless as angels must have been.

I speak one tongue, you another, yet Decay
Erects no barriers for the consecrated
Few who prowl each other with words like steppenwolves:
Nothing abrupts its drunken lyric power
Spreading like stain to all four corners
Of the body, immediately translated.

And what we give to those who sit above
With the bitten fingernails that are theirs
While we prowl each other with words like steppenwolves,
Is mercy like the coins to keep them blinder,
As I raise my hand to hold her chin up higher
As you raise your skirt to catch his tears.

DANCERS

The three of them
Scrawling across the white wall
A signature ominously looming and beautifully
Joined by the arcs their
Arms make, over and under
Like ribbons run round a
Maypole-tree

With creeping undulations of the serpentine forms
With clean unwavering sweeps of rounded spiral
In continual slow ravel and unraveling

Joined by a laughter dark
And as cold as the legs
From which, shuddering,
Fingers flee
The three of them
Scrawling across the white wall
A signature beautifully looming and ominously.

SPHINX

In hoary youth I sit, beyond depilatory, blond
Turning to beermare tawn, yawning the leonine
Growl: One beast, twice cat and triply masculine,
My paws, though pinned at wrist, still prowl
Like crusted infants' lips the nipples' rounds
Groping in foetal-lidded dark for the blood
Their skins were titled to before the knife's
Long prod-insheathed scraped out their lives
And I (auburnly flowing with a Byzantine
Book of verses, mind-meanders, though supine)
Plugged up with rag of thumb and dumb peroxide
Dab the roots of modesty for good.

I pause to lick. To run my parched tongue over
Their sun-bitten minnow bodies, although an act
Forking into scenes of mother and the murder
I commit with the noisy silence of an actor
Practiced in his part, nothing attracts
Me more. High drinks, songs, the fine
Bitches dancing on all fours around me,
Or two in one two-step dip writhing serpentine
Are so much bagpipe puff. Bored, I pause to lick,
Like an old king and father who only knows by itch
That he has children, at the very tips of his fingertips,
And drops his hands on cool throned dominion, stonily.

BACKPIECE

Cheeks to cheeks thus wedded
Like Cancer and Capricorn
Or a rosary bead torn open
Or the great triptych closing
On the third day of Creation
Of mad old Hieronymous Bosch,
To the fundamental crackdown
And debasement of the rhythm
When the sun comes up the color
Of beer hungover us all
Joining anonymous torsoes in
Decadences bottomless,
Millennial and anonymous fall.

ANTISTROPHE

Dry heaved, dawn cracking at the littoral zone,
Scum-hemmed and blenny-stitched, with the fin
And gillprint paths upon the sand directing us,
We slither a forked tongue body out of throat,
We worm by inches, brought low, the going-up,
The slow evolved anabasis home.

Here at the foot where so many have failed
And fallen back into the pond drowned in senses
Leaving behind the bones that are curled
Ornamentals, thongs for the sandal,
We lug up our belly, we rise to all fours
Aware that each movement, crawl after crawl,
Covers a shadow crawled over before
Covers a movement played over and over
In the fall.

Heavy the ascent, heavy with thunderfoot
Plod and dynasties dragging vestigially after,
Ponderous and unsure. Up ahead a shiver of light,
Something forgotten, something familiar like laughter
Wakes up the spine. It is here we must part,
My prophet; here I stand erect, and from recall
Of a glory that once inhabited this mansion
Bombarded, divided, broken down into atoms,
Hysterically scattered down the well
Of the lapping night, a home
Blasted out of itself,
I turn,
That is to say, return
Converted to the reconverted place where
I began, my eyes behind like Teiresias
Gazing on Sodom & Gomorrah's endless kiss.
The beast I was, I will not be still here,
The beast who aped the most perverted star

In dying discovers, in the holier-than-here,
Himself more than man, more an
Angel at the top of the stairs.

“THE FREE AND THE LONELY”
A FRAGMENT

*in partial fulfillment
to Leonard Ehrlich*

I write letters I string to my fingers and let fly,
In the furious ink of days I write your answers
Stuffing them into the enveloped silence, screeching
Dead or insane but (God!) not blind.

My walkingstick tapping an overtured map out of code,
From blondy centripetal Kansas hunting your brow
As you hunted with sound, hunted John Brown
Down deep in remembering blood,

I enter the cubicle tamped and compacted with poems
Of days when skeins of manuscript never stopped,
Our knees close-knit amid fiercely whispered fumes
Pillaring our music like a crooned acropolis.

Now these fingers stumble against your symphony undone
When the mind, with an oboe wildness, broke
And Franz Schubert's ghost settled into your room
As I am settled, an emaciate frayed cloak

That sits before you, all works aside, in a fraternity
Of music and meaning eternally failing as the desires
Our waning western light conceived to ensnare us,
Yet down on our knees,

Old Maestro, who finds in the mind perpetually wandering
Like a Jew, the Zero that all the keys are thronging
To, the Door jambed open and the gaze upon
The Shrug of a couple of comedians

Singing and dancing pantomime and tell-old tales,
Laughing at butterflies' lidding adagio,
Content in this cramped cell, hushed as Shiloh,
Reading the one the other's lips uplifted like braille.

TO BUTLER WAUGH

What would you have me do,
Knock upon your skull to prove
That it is wood, and kill
The child in it? I could
Not damage skin so beautiful.

How would you have me lie,
Agree time passes, your eyes
Indifferent? Or that it sits
Indifferently, beyond? I
Do not for a minute

Believe it. For the truth
I hear shaped in your mouth,
Shaped from night-broodings God
Knows how deep, is a youth
I hang my spirit on.

Then how would you have me nod:
Yes, the blond days are dead,
Dead the fraternal dynamo?
Yes, if you stuff mere words
In my head. Otherwise, no.

DAVID AND SAUL

David in the chamber
Lets his fingers fall
Over his harped torso
To the genital.
Saul, the aged lion,
Growls in his loins.

Melodies plucked pure
Tiger-red and black
Do not reach the ears
Of the raving king.
Sinewy Jonathan
Consumes the song between.

David and the prince
Tall and taut as strings
Play upon each other's
Body young imaginings.
Saul, the aged lion,
Growls in his loins.

toward dawn

No longer the singular we two wedded in bedlock,
 The simple conjugation of our love has given way
 Anatomically to forms that have eroticized the shock
 That in sharing our decadence decadence decays.

The path we once knew, immediate to our senses
 As a rose within a thin-necked vase,
 Deviously sinistral we've wandered and demented
 In the ultimate light, ultimately base.

by day

The night persists. The fictions held between us
 Curl and grow frayed in their neglected bindings
 As our fingers play past them on another corpus:
 A young American suicide, the intricate windings

Of a derelict through boyflowering Alexandrine
 Streets, ryder and nightwood and the ghostly loves
 Of a woman not yet risen from her sleep, Justine:
 The palpable pithed strings the mind is soundless of.

tonight

I lay beside you and you were whore
To my touch, and boy I craved but never could approach;
In the shadow of your neck I became the pale boy before
Me, and the girl, at your breast, open as a broach;

I lay with another woman and yet
With whom within and against what cheek I cannot say,
I cannot say anything, as we kiss, that's past, except
The thrilled breast at my tongue I will not betray.

and now

In this 2 x 4, tender on down to the soft breathings
And the cigaret passed as a metronome commenting on,
Should you turn to me to touch and find that something's
Come between us; should your fingers tick with agitation,

Tense, and cross with mine your wrist, and where
The furious strum is, I will, even as my lips erode,
Lobe with a kiss more global than the world your ear,
And whisper, when you whisper what we're coming to, God!

FOR BILL SHERIDAN

Tonight I know what being the dead is, Bill,
Though no snow is falling softly softly falling
On my heart, no, nothing that has never not
Fallen already and already melted tonight.
Here in this silence intruded upon only
By her breathings from within I think of you
And how an hour ago I saw your pale face light up
The iris of her eyes with an old romance pale
As your face, hopelessly pale but enlightened
Before her eyelids fell.
And yet we could have dashed the wineglass
To the floor that night, as in a blood-let game
Boys play; I could have given something to your
Loss, but her wing was in my mouth.
I should have seen ahead before instead of now,
Or seen before ahead to know that all the pale
Boys before me were prefaces to me, the failed
Boys before me, me then now.

Now we have fallen a fall tomorrow will
Desperately try to raise but this time finally
Fail: the way the fictions held between us,
The way the child of pretension we tried to raise
Between us finally has failed this fall.

This fall! God, Bill, where are you wandering now?
The last time we saw you it was down the hall
Of some narcotic trance or transcendental dream
Of flesh, corruption-bound like the dented
Fruits of the season; the last time, I spoke of you
In whispers, as if to reconstruct the texture
Of a skin I sensed would shrivel up
With guilt in love through hopeless dissipation
To morbid wordlessness; the last time, tonight, I saw
The iris of her eyes light up with an old romance,

Pale as I do not know what Dying-For destined face:
I only know what being the dead is, Bill,
Without the snow falling softly softly falling,
Without the gasjets burning, without the scrawled
Confession; I only know what being the dead is, Bill,
Here in this furyless room where my cold hand no
Longer hopes even for your cold hand gently
To guide me back for dying.

IMPRESSIONS IN THE
PRESENT-PERFECT

i

I have the two buns again
For your sleeping cheeks,
Bought in the dawn's bakery.

The glasses of orange juice
Stand slenderly; the coffee
Perks in the dome.

The boy, as though he knew
We wanted to be alone,
This morning especially sleeps.

Outside the snow has fallen.
I can hear the cries
Of the skiers.

Darling, are you dreaming still,
Or am I?

The cabin is buckled tight
And bundled up to the chin
With sweaters knit with reindeer.

In the central fireplace burn
Chunks of maplewood dark
As the cocoa.

A guitar. Others clatter in
Scattering crystal on the floor.
Gazing out at the white knob

Of the hill and the fine lines
We have drawn, we whisper together
While the rims of the cups dangling

From our fingers touch and vibrate
And are still.

In the little shop cocked
To one side of the street
I buy the tam o'shanter.

Unraveling the scarf you
Shake the snowflakes blondly
Out of your hair.

The proprietor, anxious for home,
Muffles the bells with his palm.
In the avenue's twilight slush

We stroll high and as flushed
As cheekbones. Hungry but miles
From the inn, we press together

In doorways and, of one leather,
Appease our appetites.

Even the empty bandstand chairs
Arranged like a musical overture
Invite us to waltzing.

When you throw back your head
As we whirl, past lovers,
Resonant in the wood,

Stop, stare, and the silence
Applauds long after its music
Is through. At the table flickered

With lobster-shell and breadcrust
We map a chessgame of our future,
Then tilt them into the cinders

The waiter touches to light
Two flaming blue dramboxies.

So tipsy is the path we blaze
Through the midnight drifts
The total zodiac grows dazzled.

Our chase outpaces Orion.
From the new dippers we drink
Crystal to quench the heat.

In the waning darkness
I strike you like a planet
And laughing, your pleated skirt

Admits one pleat more.
We see in the ice-blue morning
Hunters with guns approaching

The ground we have left behind,
Placid as flak moving south.

A MARRIAGE OF DEATH
AND LOVE

When Cohen went out and committed suicide
By stepping in front of a hit and run fender,
It was desolate Sunday on the boulevard:
Only the animals in the zoo nearby
Screamed at the body and iron thud
Screams that my body, awaking for love
In another part of the neighborhood, thought
Were the usual copulations in the clover.

And I who had not known his human breath
Known that its ghost still walks the stairs
Of the haunted body of his daughter Beth,
By whose arm interlocking down the aisle
Like band of wedding cinched to weddingband,
I can feel his will & testament to the bone,
And to her eyes, so bridled and impaired
On this high holy birthday of his death,

Can make this marriage vow and plight
A truth by God I promise to adore:
That as our bed is stretched between two walls,
That as our world is spun between two poles,
And we are each and both of us divided integers
Whose total sum is naught but the night
Before us and the night we bellow for,
Going to and fro and up and down in fright,

So the dark daughter on the shore
Tonight is joined to an heir by law,
The son the father never bore
Though his desperation wanted,
The poet son whose own night bears
A lightness for the pain of fathers,

And for their self-slaughters
Will dedicate his pen to lead
The dark daughter on the shore
Gently, ever-gently to the waters.

A CORRESPONDENCE OF AMERICANS

I

I miss those free-wheeling interborough rides
Of minds lit up through the tunnels
Where we were palely cast, and the less widest, wide
Spin and descending sift of puns down the funnel

To shuteye purgation: of the Deuce of Heads
Put together and become the one and only King Jam
Boxed in the dark age of a die and rattling ahead
Of our time Jimjack, jimjammed, jammed

In with the comicstripped faces and the frumps
Plush from soft broadways, closing, where Kid
Mulligan just happening by offered his stump
Tapping pennytunes, ponderous upon our lids.

I left it, boy, and you, end I say endlessly riding
The rails riding nowhere, shuttled for a freight
Somewhere, America, bound, with a weddingbond guiding.
So cleanly damned my weeks are like the old iambic feet

Out here, limping toward their sabbatical ends I say
Endlessly limping. And healthfully, unsicklied unto death,
With a biblebelt to keep my trousers up and lots of space
To hold my follies in, and a twanged American Gothic breath

That frequents the local tornado haunts, vainly urging
From darkness a vision of trembling hands emerging.

II

From afar, this day you brandish a bride, Dear Jim,
I gift you a handful of wishes (stop) that godhead,
The unutterable vows we made to die in need of him
Forget: his limbs are broken (steps) quite dead

(Where you are tomorrow already is, as shadows go
Easy up over the gotham we trod, westwardly ho,
And the sky is cathedraldomed like a stained blue
Eyelid closed upon a benediction of you.

Farrer now, the niggers minstrelling waters behind,
I am dawning too and stretching reflection from toe
Bent as coastlines bend embracing trades and tides,
To the badlands of my face forefathered into stone.

And her galloping, spur-hysterical mane of night
Fallen loosely like blond towns among the grain
Resolve all differences, and the votiveness of eyes
Uplifted on the bicepped hill), dear Jim, a gain

Of boys it was, no more, a fungo's soft preliminary
To play. (Steeped) now, no less than ever I be for her
Sugar in hand, rod, snake underhoof, dad, coming to her
As the lore of the land, widespread as sodomy.

III

Level, yet, your sculptural profile was with mine
Mounted high across the rivers of coffee spilt:
What volume we raised, divinity, was our divide,
Though close as one can come, we came, to guilt.

Like the flies that ate philosophies off our lips
Cactuses on the moonsplayed desert fret the mind,
And the rhythms of the streets we knew outside
Were splintered, tropical pick-up spicks,

And the nights, above all, the spaces complementary
In our eyes. Now nothing is before me, and behind
The tense of fossilized hoofprints and the weary
Pilgrims' stop, as if they had been beaten into wind,

And I move as the metric in a poem whose theme is ruin,
But more than theme or metric the poem is a ruin,
Fractured by handling cracked by time and weather,
Whose darkness is doomed henceforth to the scholar

Who'll appear with incisions of pen where, knelt,
At the edge of new waters, giantstep-trodden, I,
And peck at and pick out the message that spelt
The invisible twin opposite these arms would edify.

IV

At the extreme end something beginning is sown,
The last cablecar not chattering to its stop
But stopping to start up and clattering down
Hills like an old tune become apocalyptically bop.

So it was, the moment after the sudden earthquake
Astonished their downfalls into shatterglass toasts:
Hands fumbling into pockets fumbling with the shakes
For butt-ends to rebuild the Barbary Coast.

It all reminds me of. The same face, Love, ever
Changing and anew. The man who planted bombs
Last Christmas in your eyes, I've seen the blossoms
Up through schisms breaking; and I know howsoever

The whirr of planes approaches me, dearer by far
They are actually approaching you. Overshadowing
Unto. Like a lip I'd lay upon yours, silencing,
While wide baywaters lap trinities, heart to heart.

But I am. Fog horn, calls from low dives. Gulls cry
Above my cry. Overshadowing you too. Fag on fag
Lit up at the extreme end of. Something, a cry
I am, beginning to be fogged. Far gone and gone on jag.

V

Our images, Jim, have come to the ice
 Left in once drunkenly lifted cups.
 In the slow dissolutions, crystal clear,
 Faces are staring, of infinite failure, up.

You at the other end of the inevitable bar
 Extending crosscountry, the picketed harbor
 Of your eyes; and, picketed, I at the other,
 And inbetween all our mad specters:

The tenors intertwined, the widening forever
 Frontier song like the future tense of dreams
 Unlimited. O it's dissonance now, but listen,
 I'll stand you one and then you'll one for me

And one by one we'll topple down the ghosts
 To the gay center, where I'll say to you:
 'Lean against me with your irreligious brogue
 And I will lean the shoulder of a Jew,

Sagging as a smile, and stagger with you
 Past the stoned fictions of ourselves as gods,
 Out of these swinging doors, this omaha nowhere,
 Bound, for all space, nowhere, clods.'



2.20

Indiana U. Press

